

**The Honorable Michael B. Donley**  
**Secretary of the Air Force**  
**Air Force Sergeants Association Professional Airmen's Conference**  
**Air Force Honors Banquet and CMSAF Awards**  
**Jacksonville, Florida**  
**August 15, 2012**

**Introduction**

President Ledoux, thank you for that kind introduction. It is a pleasure to be with you tonight.

What a fantastic evening for our Air Force. I have never been prouder of our Air Force and of our enlisted force—this is truly humbling. You know, I have always said, and I will say it again later, what a privilege it is to serve with you, but I am more grateful than ever to our Nation for giving us great Airmen. This has just been a real treat tonight.

I want to compliment the Air Force Sergeants Association on hosting another successful Professional Airmen's Conference and International Convention. This is an important professional development experience for a select group of our Airmen, and I know Airmen all across our force will benefit when those attending this event return to their units to share the lessons they've learned this week.

I also want to extend my congratulations to all of tonight's award recipients. I am delighted that you have been recognized for your

dedication, commitment, and outstanding work. We are extremely proud of you and grateful for your tremendous contributions to our Air Force and our Nation.

Special congratulations also to General Gary North and to Shelly. You've been a great partner, a great commander of PACAF, a highly respected warrior, and a great model for Airmen. Gary, thanks for your leadership over so many years. And Mr. Donahue, also, thank you to the Fisher House Foundation. Please give my regards to Ken and the family. We're big fans. You do so much for our men and women in uniform, and their families. We're eternally grateful for the Fisher House Foundation. Thank you so much for all you do.

### **Defense Challenges Met By Professional Airmen**

This is an exciting time and a time of transition for the Air Force. Just last week, we bid farewell to the 19th Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Norty Schwartz, one of America's finest public servants who retired following 39 years of service. We also had the privilege to welcome his successor, General Mark Welsh, another exceptional leader who will also undoubtedly lead our Airmen with distinction. Mark, it's great to have you and Betty on board.

Over the course of the last year, our Airmen have played critical roles as our Air Force and our sister Services marked significant milestones, including the raid against bin Laden, the successful Libya campaign, the completion of military operations in Iraq, and the beginning of efforts to bring military operations to a close in Afghanistan.

Indeed, these are positive signs of progress, and all who contributed to these efforts can take pride in this work. Notable as this progress is, many security challenges remain. Today, our forces are still engaged in Afghanistan, and we continue the wide-reaching fight against al Qaeda and its global affiliates. At the same time, we confront a variety of other threats, such as nuclear proliferation, failed states, and cyberterrorism, to name a few. And not coincidentally, some of these are still happening in the CENTCOM area of operations.

We face a dynamic strategic environment, and we are also up against serious financial constraints, which together led to a new Defense Strategic Guidance and a budget proposal that reduces defense spending by \$487 billion over 10 years as required by last year's Budget Control Act. As a practical matter, our Air Force is doing more with less, but we have only been able to make up the difference and get the job done for our Joint

teammates and for the Nation because of the unmatched quality and performance of our Airmen.

One reason we can boast about the quality of our Airmen is due to the unrivaled quality and professionalism of our Noncommissioned Officer Corps. You are expert trainers, leaders, coaches, and mentors to our entire force, from junior Airmen to officers alike. What's more, our NCO Corps is the envy of the world. The world has seen nothing like it, and for that, we owe many of you here tonight a debt of gratitude.

### **Air Force Culture and the Importance of Standards**

By necessity, a lot of talk in Washington revolves around our strategic posture and budget challenges. But I want to address another critical topic this evening. That is, what we must do to continue to develop the quality Airmen we need, Airmen who uphold Air Force standards, embrace our culture, and whose conduct reflects our Core Values – *Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence In All We Do*.

From an Air Force senior leadership perspective, we know that high operations tempos and budget constraints have put our Airmen and their families under intense pressure. But whatever the intensity of our Nation's demands, in war or in peace, we have an abiding obligation to this institution, that we know and love as the United States Air Force, to

develop and retain quality Airmen of character who earn and deserve the trust placed in them by the American people, who continue to express greater confidence in the military than in other national institutions.

Lately, all of us in the Air Force family and citizens across the country have been shocked and troubled by allegations of professional and sexual misconduct by basic military training instructors at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland. The allegations range from violations of Air Force policy that prohibits unprofessional relationships to crimes of sexual assault.

The misconduct alleged has no place in our Air Force culture and is especially egregious when it occurs in the basic military training environment. This behavior constitutes an abuse of power and an abuse of trust which cannot and will not be tolerated.

Courts-martial have been held at Lackland, Airmen have been convicted, and investigations continue. The Air Force has taken aggressive steps to assist the victims and increase protections for our Airmen in the training environment. I expect command directed investigations to identify any systemic failures and to develop reform recommendations to help prevent such behavior. The Chief and I, along with General Rice, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Jim Roy, and

other Air Force leaders will be addressing next steps in the immediate weeks and months ahead.

But it cannot be denied that if all of our Airmen followed the rules and lived by Air Force standards, these crimes and policy violations would never have taken place. We hold Airmen to high standards because that's what is expected of us, and what we expect of each other – to set the example; to treat people with dignity and respect; to act promptly to right a wrong; to protect people under our charge; and to live by Air Force Core Values.

Most members of our force understand this, and the vast majority of our NCOs and commissioned officers fulfill the obligations of their oath. At the same time, we must be watchful for Airmen who become lax, or worse, those who fall into criminal behavior.

Let me be clear about what is at stake here. First, we risk immeasurable harm to the Airmen who are victimized by others. Sexual misconduct is a breach of trust that undermines Airmen's confidence in each other and erodes good order and discipline. Equally important, we risk great harm to the institution – to the good reputation of the Air Force – if our military culture allows such misconduct to occur. And we risk serious harm to our national security if we fail to maintain the good order and

discipline that keep our force ready for any contingency when the Nation calls.

So, what is to be done? Let's focus on the basics and the kind of Air Force in which we want to live and operate. I ask all of you to go to our governing documents and read Air Force Instruction 1-1, AIR FORCE STANDARDS. This instruction was issued just last week and was written to address contemporary challenges in the area of standards. I encourage you to discuss this instruction with your fellow NCOs and the Airmen in your charge.

AFI 1-1 is directive in nature. We expect Airmen to follow the rules, and these instructions plainly describe the values, customs and courtesies, conduct, and standards of behavior we demand.

Leaders at every level have an obligation to adhere to and enforce Air Force standards. The Air Force especially depends on our NCOs. NCOs play an essential role in maintaining and passing on the Air Force culture to new generations of Airmen. We are counting on you to ensure that our Airmen do their utmost to live by the Air Force's Core Values and standards of conduct at all times and to establish and maintain a unit climate and culture that reflects what we stand for.

This is family business. Nobody will do this for us. We must do it for ourselves, for our Airmen, and for our Air Force. And I have every confidence that we will confront this challenge, and come out a stronger and better Air Force on the other side. And you will help take us there.

## **Conclusion**

This week is a great week for professional development, and for rekindling friendships and relationships that link generations of Airmen one to the next, across decades of faithful service to our country. We have a proud history and heritage, and I hope you will celebrate that this week.

Let us not forget that hundreds of thousands of our Airmen do what's right every day. The ten Airmen honored tonight with the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Award are representative of these Airmen. They come from a variety of career fields and serve in locations across the United States and around the world, but they share a common commitment to excellence, superior performance, and remarkable achievement that reflects their positions as trained professionals, the Airmen of character entrusted with America's security.

Americans hold their military to a high standard, and rightly so. We have an obligation to live by our Core Values and to meet or exceed the high standards the American people expect of us. Together, we can fulfill



our responsibility to protect and strengthen the force and preserve the confidence of our service members and the American people.

On behalf of the United States Air Force, I want to once again thank the Air Force Sergeants Association for being such a strong advocate for our Airmen across all of the enlisted grades, as well as for retirees, veterans, and military families. We appreciate all you do, and it is an honor to serve with you in the world's finest Air Force.

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